



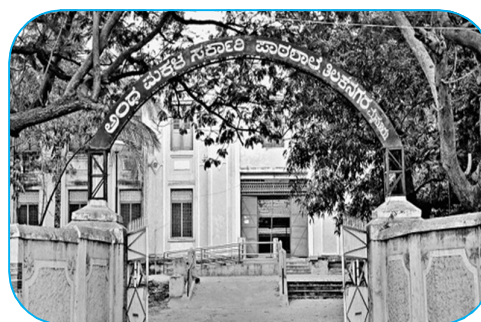
EDUCATING FOR SELF-RELIANCE: THE MYSORE INSTITUTION FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND, 1901-1922 A Historical Study of Special Education, State Patronage and Vocational Training

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ABSTRACT

The history of disability education in princely India remains less studied than the history of general education and administrative reform. This article examines the Mysore Institution for the Deaf and the Blind from its establishment in 1901 to 1922, focusing on its educational practices, teacher preparation, Braille work, vocational training, hostel arrangements, finance and relationship with the Mysore State. The study is based primarily on contemporary institutional correspondence, annual reports, financial statements and related records preserved in the source document supplied for this research. It also uses published historical studies and government material to place the institution within the wider development of special education in India. The evidence shows that the institution began as a small voluntary initiative but gradually became an important centre for deaf and blind education in Mysore. Royal patronage, especially the support associated with Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, helped the institution obtain teacher training, scholarships and Braille facilities. At the same time, the institution depended on government grants, District Board contributions and private philanthropy. Its curriculum combined literacy with speech and lip-reading for deaf pupils, Braille, music and reading for blind pupils, and practical skills such as tailoring, weaving, knitting and rattan work. The article argues that the institution represented an early shift from a purely charitable approach towards an educational model that emphasized skill, employment and self-reliance. Its history also reveals the limits of that model, especially shortages of trained teachers, accommodation and regular finance.



KEYWORDS: *Mysore State; special education; deaf education; blind education; disability history; Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV; Braille; vocational education; teacher training; self-reliance.*

INTRODUCTION

Education for persons with disabilities in India developed slowly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Early institutions were often created by missionaries, private philanthropists and voluntary groups, and state involvement developed gradually. Historical accounts of Indian special education identify schools for deaf and blind learners in the late nineteenth century and note the establishment of the Mysore school for deaf and blind children in 1901. This development is important because it shows that special education was becoming an identifiable field of institutional work before independence.

The Mysore case deserves closer historical study. The institution was established in 1901 with one blind pupil and three deaf pupils and initially functioned through voluntary initiative. The records

supplied for this study show that it soon attracted the attention of the Mysore administration and the royal household. A visit by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV in 1903 became an important stage in its development. The institution subsequently expanded its educational activities, introduced teacher preparation, developed Braille facilities, provided vocational instruction and maintained a hostel for pupils who could not otherwise access education.

Existing references usually mention the Mysore institution as an early milestone in the history of special education. However, a focused historical examination of its institutional development, funding structure and educational aims can provide a clearer picture of how disability education operated within a princely state. This article therefore treats the institution as a historical site where charity, education, state responsibility, royal patronage and the emerging idea of self-support came together.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAP

Scholarship on Mysore has examined the transformation of the princely state, the development of modern education and the role of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV. Aya Ikegame's study of princely Mysore is especially useful for understanding how education and modern institutional practices were connected with the changing political and social culture of the state. Studies of Indian special education, including historical accounts of deaf and blind education, provide the wider context for the emergence of specialized schools, Braille and vocational training.

Government and institutional sources also confirm the long historical importance of the Mysore school. A Mysore Gazetteer description records separate deaf and blind sections, training in reading, writing, arithmetic and practical industries, music education for blind pupils and the reputation of the institution beyond Mysore. Later government material identifies 1901 as the beginning of organized welfare measures for persons with disabilities in Karnataka. These sources are useful, but they generally provide brief descriptions rather than a detailed institutional history.

The research gap addressed here is therefore specific: how did the Mysore institution move from a small voluntary school towards a more organized educational and vocational institution, and what did this development reveal about the changing idea of disability education in early twentieth-century Mysore? The article addresses this question through close reading of the contemporary institutional records available in the supplied source.

OBJECTIVES

- To trace the establishment and institutional development of the Mysore Institution for the Deaf and the Blind between 1901 and 1922.
- To examine the role of royal patronage, government support and voluntary contributions.
- To study the curriculum and teaching methods used for deaf and blind pupils.
- To examine teacher training, Braille production, vocational education and hostel facilities.
- To assess the extent to which the institution promoted employment and self-reliance.

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This study follows a historical, qualitative and source-based methodology. The principal primary source is the archival compilation supplied for the research. It contains correspondence, reports, appeals, financial statements and descriptions relating to the Mysore Institution for the Deaf and the Blind. The records cover the formative decades of the institution and include material connected with the years 1903–1922. The source is treated as an institutional record and therefore as evidence of both actual activities and the way administrators represented those activities.

The study uses chronological reconstruction and thematic analysis. The main themes are institutional origin, royal patronage, curriculum, teacher training, Braille, vocational education, hostel arrangements and finance. Published works and government sources are used for contextual comparison. Where the archival record makes a claim about the success of the institution or the employment of former pupils, the claim is presented as an institutional statement rather than as independently verified statistical evidence.

The original records also contain period terminology for deaf and blind persons that is now outdated. This article uses contemporary respectful terminology in the analytical discussion while retaining historical institutional names where necessary for source identification.

Establishment of the Institution in 1901

The Mysore Institution for the Deaf and the Blind was founded on 23 October 1901, on Vijayadasami day. The source records the beginning of the school with one blind pupil and three deaf pupils in the house of M. Srinivasa Rao, who served as founder secretary. The small number of pupils suggests that the institution began as a local voluntary experiment rather than as a fully developed government establishment.

In 1902 the institution moved to the Old Post Office Building. The records also refer to a monthly government grant of Rs. 25 after the visit of the Dewan of Mysore. This early support is significant because it indicates that government assistance appeared at a relatively early stage, even though the institution continued to depend on voluntary management and public contributions.

Royal Patronage and the Turning Point of 1903

On 17 September 1903 Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV visited the institution. The visit marked an important stage in the school's development because it brought the institution into closer contact with the highest level of the Mysore State. A subsequent letter dated 14 October 1903 records the decision to support the training of a graduate at Calcutta in the teaching of deaf pupils, with an estimated expenditure of Rs. 285.

The decision to invest in teacher training is particularly important. It shows that special education was understood as requiring specialized knowledge and trained personnel. The institution was not expected to function simply through goodwill. Training in another centre was viewed as a way of developing local professional capacity.

Royal patronage must, however, be placed within the wider educational development of Mysore. Studies of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV show that education and modern institutions were important features of his reign. The Mysore institution represents a less frequently discussed part of that educational history: the extension of organized education to children who were excluded from ordinary schooling.

Curriculum and Educational Practices

The deaf section combined academic and communication training. The records describe reading, writing, articulation, speech-reading and related exercises. The oral approach was prominent. At the same time, education was linked with practical training. This combination reflected the institutional aim of preparing pupils for useful activity rather than limiting education to basic literacy. The blind section followed a different educational pattern. Pupils learned reading, writing and arithmetic through Braille. Music was an important part of the curriculum, and advanced pupils were prepared for further study and possible employment. The difference between the two sections is historically important because it shows that the institution recognized that educational methods had to be adapted to the needs of different groups.

Braille and the Development of Educational Materials

The development of Braille facilities was one of the most important institutional achievements. The records mention support for a Braille plant and later assistance connected with Braille production. A contemporary description of Mysore also noted the presence of a Braille printing plant and stated that blind pupils participated in the composing work. This indicates that the institution was not only consuming educational materials but also becoming involved in their production.

Government information on the history of Braille in India records the existence of different Indian Braille codes, including the Mysore and Kannada code, before later attempts at standardization. This broader history makes the Mysore Braille work especially relevant. It places the institution within

the development of regional systems of accessible reading rather than treating Braille simply as a classroom technique.

Teacher Training and the Normal Class

Teacher preparation was a recurring concern in the institutional records. T. Venkata Rao was sent to Calcutta for training in teaching deaf pupils, and later P. N. Venkata Rau also received training. These examples demonstrate the importance attached to professional preparation.

A Normal class was opened in the later period to train teachers of deaf and blind pupils. The purpose was to create a wider pool of trained teachers who could serve special schools beyond Mysore city. The institutional reports nevertheless continued to mention shortages of trained staff. This tension between institutional expansion and limited human resources was one of the major constraints on the school's development.

Vocational Education and Self-Reliance

Vocational education was central to the institution's educational philosophy. Deaf pupils were trained in rattan work, weaving, tailoring, knitting and related crafts. Blind pupils received music training and other practical instruction. These activities were not presented merely as recreation. They were linked with the possibility of earning a livelihood.

The emphasis on self-reliance is one of the most important findings of this study. The institutional records repeatedly connect education with employment and useful work. The later historical summary also states that former pupils entered government and private employment and other occupations. Such statements should be read as institutional claims, but they clearly reveal the goal that education should reduce dependence on charity.

The idea of self-reliance also appears in the institution's concern with after-care. Students leaving the school could require tools, materials or assistance to begin work. This shows an early understanding that successful rehabilitation required support beyond the classroom.

Hostel, Poverty and Access

The hostel was an essential part of the institution because many pupils came from poor families and from areas outside Mysore city. The annual reports repeatedly mention pupils who could not be admitted because of shortage of accommodation and funds. Thus, the hostel was closely connected with the question of educational access.

The 1919-20 report recorded about 49 pupils on the rolls and noted that additional deserving pupils could not be admitted. The hostel also depended on contributions from District Boards and private supporters. Rising food prices created additional pressure. These records show that the institution's social mission was larger than its available resources.

The 1921-22 report similarly recorded a larger student strength but continued to identify accommodation and finance as barriers to admission. The institutional problem was therefore not lack of demand but lack of capacity.

Finance and the Question of State Responsibility

The financial structure of the institution was mixed. Government grants, royal contributions, District Board assistance and private donations all played a role. This arrangement gave the institution flexibility but also made its finances uncertain.

The annual reports indicate that ordinary grants were insufficient to cover all institutional needs, especially hostel expenses, staff requirements and special equipment. The financial records therefore reveal an important historical transition: disability education was increasingly treated as a public responsibility, but the State had not yet assumed full financial responsibility.

This issue appears clearly in the institutional argument that education for deaf and blind children should receive stronger support from the Education Department. The request reflects an emerging concept of education as a public obligation rather than only a charitable activity.

Institutional Reputation and Wider Reach

By the 1910s and early 1920s the institution had acquired a reputation beyond Mysore. A contemporary Mysore description recorded that the school attracted pupils from outside the state and described its deaf and blind sections, vocational work and music training. The reputation of the institution was therefore based on more than its age. Its combination of specialized teaching, vocational work and residential facilities made it distinctive.

An early twentieth-century publication also carried information about the Mysore Institution and identified M. Srinivasa Rao as founder and secretary and P. N. V. Rau as secretary. This wider circulation of information suggests that the institution was connected with networks of blind education that extended beyond the Mysore State.

DISCUSSION

The history of the Mysore Institution suggests three connected changes. First, disability education moved from a small charitable initiative towards an organized educational institution. Second, specialized knowledge became increasingly important through teacher training and Braille. Third, vocational training gave education an economic purpose.

These developments should not be described as a simple linear story of progress. The institution continued to face shortages of teachers, funds and accommodation. The dependence on royal and private support also meant that educational opportunity remained partly dependent on philanthropy. The institution's history therefore shows both the possibilities and limits of early welfare-oriented education.

The Mysore case also complicates a purely colonial explanation of special education. Missionary and voluntary organizations were important in the wider Indian history of deaf and blind education, but the Mysore institution developed within a princely state where the palace, state departments and local voluntary networks interacted. Royal patronage did not replace public responsibility, but it helped create the institutional conditions in which special education could expand.

CONCLUSION

The Mysore Institution for the Deaf and the Blind, founded in 1901, occupies an important place in the history of special education in Karnataka and India. From a beginning with four pupils, it developed into a more organized institution with separate educational sections, Braille facilities, teacher training, vocational education and residential support.

The evidence from the contemporary records shows that royal patronage, government assistance and voluntary support worked together in the institution's development. At the same time, financial limitations and shortages of teachers and accommodation remained persistent. The institution's most significant educational contribution was its effort to connect literacy with practical skills and employment.

The study therefore argues that the early Mysore model of special education was shaped by a transition from charity towards capability. The objective was increasingly not only to care for deaf and blind pupils but to educate, train and prepare them for self-support. This history deserves further study through pupil biographies, institutional registers, Kannada-language sources, government education records and oral histories of later generations.

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